

Protecting Sources

Communications & Media

A promise of confidentiality is close to absolute, and hard to keep in practice.

What the promise means, and what threatens it.

The undertaking

Promise only what you can honour

Explain the limits before they speak

Agree what may be published exactly

Keep the promise after publication too

Tell the editor and the lawyer, not others

Practical threats

Metadata, call records and location data

Shared drives and searchable messages

Small pools where detail identifies

Devices seized or handed over

Notes retained longer than needed

Educational reference. Legal protection for sources varies widely and is often weaker than assumed. Take specialist advice before promising.